

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission



Annual Report
2012-2013

*Serving the communities of the
Georgia Mountains Region since 1962*

2012-2013 COUNCIL MEMBERS



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*Served Partial Year

Regional Solutions, Strategies, and Partnerships

The IMPACT of your GMRC

- ◆ Received 12th NADO Innovation Award
- ◆ 131 youth were served by Workforce Development Programs
- ◆ 4 new loans were made bringing the total loan count to 12 with assets totaling \$1.6 million
- ◆ Completed the Regional Plan & authored 4 local comprehensive plans for member governments
- ◆ 150 new jobs were created as a result of projects
- ◆ Assisted four governments with National Register nominations
- ◆ 573 adult and dislocated workers were served through Workforce Development assistance
- ◆ \$1,217,561 in federal and state grant funding was awarded to GMRC communities

In Memory

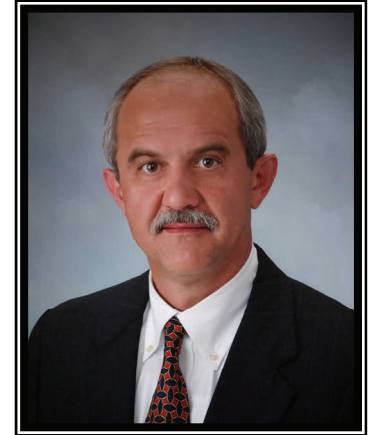


Stanley E. "Butch" Darnell

December 5, 1948—June 21, 2013

Chairman's Message

As I reflect on my last year as Chairman, it is exciting to look back at the many achievements of our staff. With the addition of the Workforce Investment staff, we have also increased both our staffing level and our budget many times over. I do hope that you will congratulate them individually as you come into contact with them. We have ongoing project engagements all over the region, and I smile a big smile as I meet one of our GMRC vehicles or Mobile Training Units during my daily travels around Northeast Georgia.



Our Revolving Loan Fund activity continues to grow as we see more and more interest in the loan fund as we get the message out to local financial institutions and others. Also, I salute the Revolving Loan Fund committee for their diligent effort in extending loans to businesses of our region, and in the process, growing our portfolio of investments.

It has indeed been a pleasure to serve as your Chairman for this extended period of time. Our intent was to leave the Council in at least as good of shape as we found it. Due to the leadership of Executive Director Danny and his staff, however, the Commission has grown and prospered during this period, and I am humbled to have had the opportunity to play a small role. I look forward to the continued growth of the Commission under the able leadership of our new Chairman, Sam Norton.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Stovall'.

David Stovall
Chairman

***Congrats
GMRC
on 50
Years!!!***



GMRC STAFF



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*Staff photos were taken at the Byron Herbert Reece Farm and Interpretive Center, Union County, Georgia



Executive Director's Report

W . D a n n y L e w i s

Good day to you all-



Your Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) continues to bounce back and is considered an excellent Regional Commission throughout this state and nation. We just received our 12th National Association Development Organization's (NADO) Innovation Award. We proudly display these in our main hall in our office. This year's award was for the City of Lavonia's Historic Southern Railway Depot Renovation project, which is also back to back awards for Lavonia.

We had lost our Revolving Loan Fund Program and have restored it to its rightful place. We are seeing a lot of loan request activity from businesses in the region and many loans being made by our Revolving Loan Fund Committee.

We lost our Workforce Investment Board about 15 years ago and it was restored two years ago to the GMRC operations. We have seen some very positive changes to this operation since the change to GMRC and overall supervision by the Governor's Office of Workforce Development.

As we complete our 50th Anniversary, I am very pleased with our Boards and Commission and the successes of our 51 local governments we serve. Many of our local elected officials also serve in leadership positions in their community and in state organizations. Our staff, likewise, are involved in leadership in regional, state, and national organizations.

We are making a difference, together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of W. Danny Lewis in black ink.

W. Danny Lewis
Executive Director



Economic Development



Pictured L to R: **Nancy Smallwood**, Economic Development Representative; **Heather Feldman**, Director of Economic Development; **Meisa Pace**, Grant Administrator; and **Patrick Larson**, Economic Development Representative.

ARC Grants Awarded

A total of \$743,955 in Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant funding was awarded to member governments for the following projects:

- ♦ **Habersham County Development Authority**—Water & Sewer Infrastructure Project
- ♦ **City of Lavonia**—Raw Water Intake Project
- ♦ **City of Royston**—Renovation of Historic Royston Depot
- ♦ **Food Bank of Northeast Georgia**—(Rabun County) The Whole Community Food Network—Food Hub

GRANT ADMINISTRATION

GMRC staff administered
\$4,824,687 in federal and state
grant funds.

Helping Local Communities Compete in the Global Market

The goal of the Economic Development Department is to provide assistance in the creation of a diversified, well-balanced, progressive economy for the region. Efforts are aimed at assisting communities seek grant and loan funding for projects that generate jobs and opportunity, leverage private investment, and improve the quality of life for residents living in the Georgia Mountains Region.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Working in close coordination with the CEDS Committee, chaired by GMRC Council Member, Bill Chafin, ED staff prepared the Five-Year update to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and submitted the document to the Economic Development Administration. Through a consensus building, the CEDS aims to establish a unified economic development roadmap for the Georgia Mountains Region.



EMPG Grant Awarded

The **City of Royston** received \$30,450 in Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) Response and Recovery Program funding from the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA).



Baseball Tomorrow Fund **Grant Awarded**

The **City of Royston** received \$43,156 in grant funding from the Baseball Tomorrow Fund from Major League Baseball to support the Royston Youth Baseball Fields Revitalization by providing funding state-of-the-art fencing for two fields.



The GMRC received a 2013 National Association of Development Organization (NADO) Innovation Award for the **City of Lavonia's** Historic Southern Railway Depot Renovation Project.



CDBG-EIP Grant Awarded

Rabun County was awarded \$300,000 in Community Development Block Grant—Employment Incentive Program (CDBG-EIP) funding for machinery and equipment to facilitate the expansion of Gap Partners, Inc. in the Rabun Business Park. At a total investment cost of approximately \$2,000,000, the project will create 30 new jobs.

ITAD Grants Awarded

A total of \$100,000 in Immediate Threat and Danger (ITAD) Grant funding was awarded from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for the following projects:

The **City of Royston** received \$50,000 in Immediate Threat and Danger Grant funding from the Georgia Department of Community affairs for water improvements for the Vanna Community.

The **City of Oakwood** received \$50,000 in ITAD grant funding for sewer improvements to a low and moderate income area within the city.



\$1,217,561

Awarded in grant funding for
GMRC communities

150 new jobs

Created as a result of grant
funding

\$10,500,000

In private investment was
leveraged for these projects

Information Services

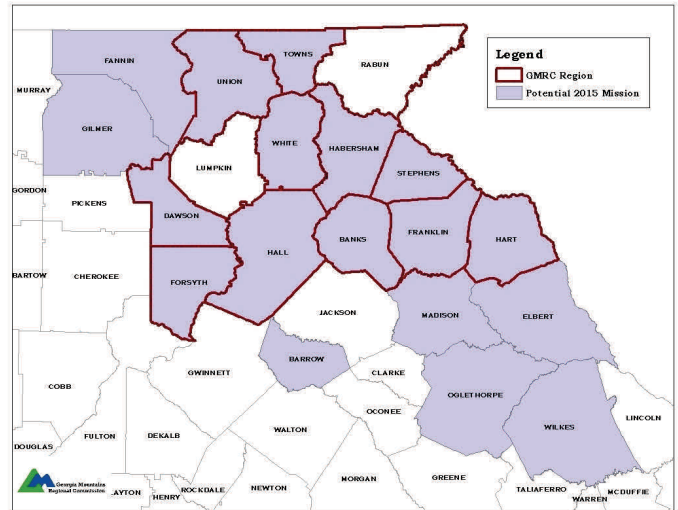
Reaching New Heights In Innovation From the Ground Up

The Information Services Department provides specialized services to our member governments with the primary focus being Geographic Information Services (GIS). From infrastructure inventory to aerial photography, we strive to create and maintain the highest quality information for our communities.



Faith Bryan, Information Services Director

Aerial Photography **Mission 2015**



On October 1, 2012, GMRC received grant funding for the second year, through the Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GOHS) to operate the CarFit program in the region. The program is designed to help drivers get a better fit with their vehicles. During this grant cycle, 500 participants were trained CarFit in the 28 events that were held around the GMRC region. In June 2013, GTIPI (Georgia Traffic Injury Prevention Institute) trained 30 Georgia State Patrolman, stationed in the region, to be CarFit Technicians. These technicians can assist our CarFit Coordinator with future events.

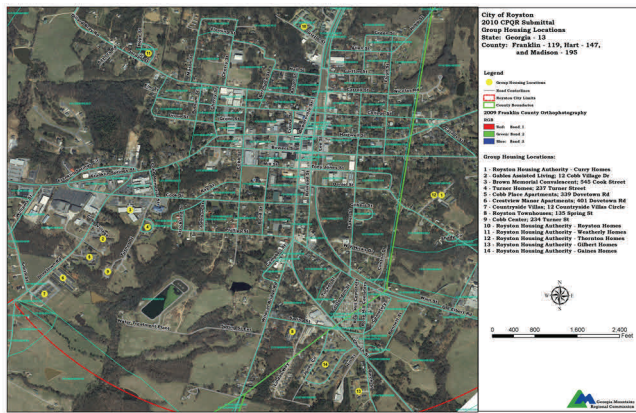


Representatives from around the GMRC region attended a meeting to gauge the interest in a cooperative effort to collect 6" pixel resolution aerial photography. Aerial photography is used in all of our county and city offices for many different types of projects, but mostly in the tax assessor's office. They use it for change detection for new buildings or building additions, swimming pools or any other property improvements. A cooperative effort across the region could save up to 30% in acquisition costs vs. a single county acquiring the same data. It was decided that the aerial photography mission be conducted during the leaf-off season of 2015.



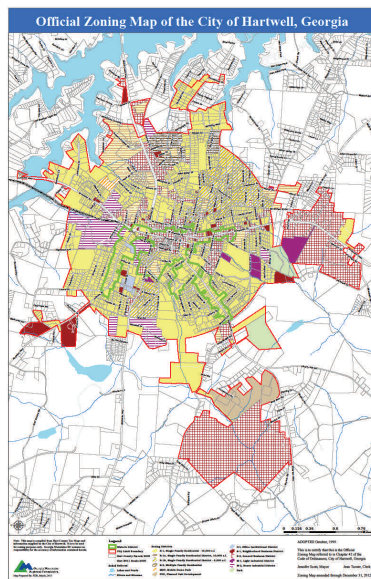
City of Royston CQR
Census Appeal

On behalf of the **City of Royston**, GMRC submitted a 2010 Census Count Question Resolution (CQR) based on group housing quarters being undercounted. "Group Housing" is defined as apartments, student housing, nursing homes and jails. The twelve apartment complexes and two nursing homes were re-counted and submitted to the Census Bureau based on the population counts in those quarters on April 1, 2010.



City of Hartwell Zoning Map

Using the most recent **Hart County** digital tax parcel database, GMRC completely revised and updated the Zoning Map for the **City of Hartwell**. All annexations, parcel splits and re-zonings were submitted by the Zoning Administrator for the city.



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ◆ Created **Habersham County** two foot elevation contours from the 2010 LiDAR data
- ◆ Assisted **Union County** with proposed 2010 Census appeal
- ◆ Created project site maps for **Stephens County Development Authority** including two—foot elevation contours and aerial photography
- ◆ Began the Mt Hope Cemetery Inventory project for the **City of Dahlonega**



- ◆ Prepared Zoning Map updates for the cities of **Dawsonville, Clarkesville, Lavonia, Maysville, Carnesville, Hartwell, Cornelia, and Young Harris**
- ◆ Began **Towns County** Tax Parcel Map Project to include converting all tax maps from paper to digital format and updating parcel splits and merges from 2008 to present
- ◆ Updated Burgess Memorial Cemetery map for the **City of Lavonia**
- ◆ Updated water and sewer Infrastructure maps for the **City of Clarkesville**
- ◆ Assisted the cities of **Maysville, Dawsonville, Clermont, Cornelia, and Mount Airy** with US Census BAS (Boundary and Annexation Survey) maps
- ◆ Created a Downtown Development Authority District Map for the **City of Dawsonville**
- ◆ Updated city limits and annexations maps for the **City of Demorest**

Planning



Pictured L to R: Joe Rothwell, Regional Planner; Sarah McQuade, Regional Planner; and Adam Hazell, Planning Director.

Helping Communities Shape Their Future

The Planning Department's primary role is to serve our local governments in the planning and development of their communities. As such, the GMRC performs complete projects and documents upon request including comprehensive plans, environmental studies, neighborhood assessments, specialized area studies, and transportation planning.

Local Planning Highlights

The GMRC Planning Department staff authored four local Comprehensive Plans for several communities during FY 13:

- ◆ Banks County & Cities
- ◆ City of Lula
- ◆ Habersham County & Cities
- ◆ Rabun County & Cities

Regional Plan Update

With the approval of the Regional Agenda, the GMRC completed a full update of the *Regional Plan*. This is the first version of the document under the latest state standards and will shape the scope of activity the RC can pursue under its contracts with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. The Agenda also incorporates the GMRC's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in a first-ever attempt to merge the two documents, ensuring more closely coordinated implementation of projects and a more streamlined update process in the future. The Agenda was submitted to DCA for final approval.

Regional Reviews are how the GMRC ensures coordination among governments with regard to planning issues and objectives, Developments of Regional Impact (DRI), transportation goals and more. These reviews share information across communities and build collaboration in resolving any identified conflicts. During FY 2013, GMRC staff worked on the following:

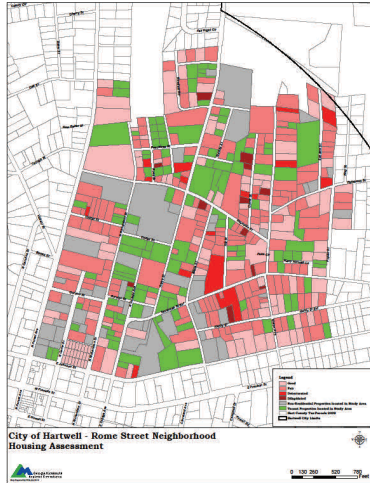
<u>Total</u>	<u>Review Type</u>
8	Local Plans
6	DRIs
5	State Intergovernmental (A-95)
12	Natural Resource (Sec. 104)

A continuing demand throughout the region is a focus on historic downtowns and commercial centers, places that serve as social and economic centers for many communities. During FY13, GMRC staff surveyed the business types and occupancy conditions for seven cities and developed profiles of the commercial and industrial make up for these unique spaces. This data will be used as part of comparative analyses as these cities begin to consider what types of businesses can succeed in each setting, and what each community must do to better support their downtown economies.



Rome Street Neighborhood Housing Assessment

To help the **City of Hartwell** with their plans to revitalize a struggling neighborhood, GMRC staff developed the *Rome Street Neighborhood Housing Assessment*. The survey examined 309 residential properties within the neighborhood to identify areas that required immediate improvement and solutions for these areas.



Gainesville Housing Survey & Assessment

GMRC staff worked on the *Gainesville Housing Survey and Assessment* - a multi-year effort to create a more comprehensive database of housing units and conditions for the **City of Gainesville**. This will assist with several Comprehensive Plan objectives, including plans for new infill policies and various neighborhood-scale initiatives. Work includes photographing and inventorying all housing units and an assessment of architectural form and structural conditions. This data will yield a housing conditions database and maps for use in creating an infill and redevelopment strategy to help fulfill the city's housing objectives. To date, 1,191 properties have been surveyed.

Hazard Mitigation Planning

The Planning Department continued working with communities in developing the updates of their *Hazard Mitigation Plans*, documents that coordinated disaster preparedness and are required for financial assistance from FEMA.

Banks County	Completed
Dawson County	Completed
Franklin County	In Progress
Habersham County	In Progress
Rabun County	Completed
Stephens County	In Progress
Towns County	In Progress

Regional Hazard Mitigation

In FY13, the GMRC developed a *Regional Hazard Mitigation Strategy*. This first-of-its kind document provides an overview of those issues and mitigation measures that were distinctly common or multi-jurisdictional. This will allow the GMRC to compliment local mitigation efforts by fostering joint projects, better coordinating pursuits for additional funding, and developing new networks for communication among stakeholders as we begin to address disaster preparedness at the regional level.

Local Food Assessment



The Planning and Economic Development staff partnered with the NWGRC and the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project to complete a *Local Farm and Food Assessment* for a 34 county region of North

Georgia. This study surveyed residents of the 34 counties to examine the relationship between food grown in the region and consumption and spending by local residents and visitors. In total, 737 individuals responded from the region and the data will be used to shape efforts to improve coordination between local growers and commercial consumers.



ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

In FY 2013, the GMRC began taking a more active role in the implementation of the state approved management plans for 2 of the 3 Water Planning Districts in the region. In collaboration with Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, the GMRC began work with the Coosa North Georgia District to outline formal parameters to implement and ensure local compliance with their plan while establishing project priorities for FY14.

Assisted the Chestatee -Chattahoochee RC&D with implementation of Phase II watershed improvements in the Mud Creek and Little Mud Creek watersheds in **Banks, Habersham,** and **Hall** Counties. Throughout the year, GMRC staff collected 20 samples from 11 different sites for monitoring water quality. Staff also assisted in the close-out of BMP installations for 5 property owners and amended the existing Watershed Management Plan.



Assisted the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D with the implementation of Phase I activity in the Coldwater Creek watershed in **Hart** and Elbert Counties. This included working with a local advisory committee to develop the Watershed Management Plan to identify possible pollution sources and outline proposed mitigation measures to restore water quality. Five different samples were collected from 10 sites throughout the watershed then tested at the GMRC to gauge water quality in the area.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The Georgia Mountains Region is blessed with an abundance of architectural treasures and historically significant properties, and the GMRC is responsible for helping community's in their efforts to protect, restore, and promote these cultural and historic resources.

During FY13, GMRC staff authored one preservation related grant, worked on four National Register nominations and provided training and guidance for 13 commu-

Dahlonega Historic District

The GMRC updated the ***Dahlonega Historic District Design Guidelines***, making edits to existing standards and definitions as well as amendments that address the adjoining Park Street residential neighborhood. Updating the guidelines will ensure the preservation of "character defining features" of historic properties in Dahlonega, and help ensure the compatibility of new development that contributes to the city's rich fabric.

National Register Nominations

During FY 13, GMRC staff assisted the following communities in preparing National Register nominations for historic buildings:

- ◆ **City of Blairsville**
- ◆ **City of Clermont**
- ◆ **City of Dawsonville**
- ◆ **Town of Homer**

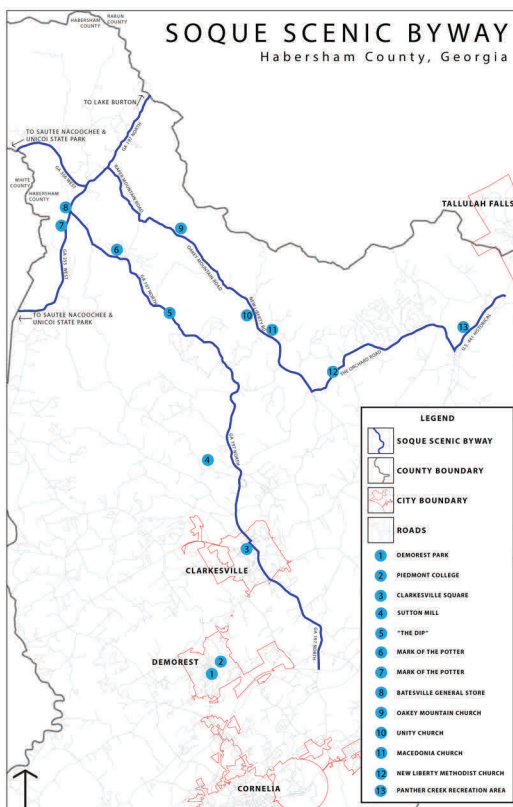


TRANSPORTATION

GMRC staff continued work on the Rails-to-Trails proposals for the Gainesville & Northwestern and Tallulah Falls corridors. During FY13, presentations were made to the **Clermont** Historical Society, the **Helen** Arts and Heritage Center, the **Gainesville-Hall** Metropolitan Planning Association, and the **White** County Historical Society about the economic and cultural significance of the railroad to the communities and how the historic resource could be used as a method of economic development today. Staff also continued to work with local governments and Department of Transportation in identifying priority elements for development upon realization of funding.

Scenic Byway Program

During FY13, GMRC staff performed the annual survey and monitoring update for the Russell-Brasstown Byway Management Plan, helped close out applications for the recently approved Soque Scenic Byway and continued work on the proposed **Franklin-Hart** Rural Byway.



Clayton Streetscape Plan

The **Clayton Streetscape Improvement Plan** was created as a guide for future development along the primary transportation corridors and gateways within the city's downtown. The study defines strategies for creating a streetscape that will complement the historic character of the architecture, facilitate easy access to downtown, and to make the area more conducive to pedestrian activities. Elements of design considered that would contribute towards a more cohesive, aesthetically pleasing, and vibrant pedestrian experience included: trees, street and sidewalk accent lighting, uniform paving materials, pedestrian seating, safety, and litter control.



Regional Transit

In coordination with the Departments of Transportation (DOT) and Human Services (DHS), the GMRC began preliminary work for introducing Coordinated Transit to the full region. This expanded form of rural transit service for specialized populations was previously only practiced in three counties in the region, but beginning in FY14, additional funding and services will support the program in all 13 counties. GMRC staff received training in program administration, participated in the annual RFP for services, and began collecting data for future assessments of program performance.



Workforce Development

Improving the Training & Skills of the Region's Workforce To Drive Future Economic Growth

To achieve sustainable economic growth and individual self-sufficiency by developing, sustaining, and promoting employment resources and opportunities for all job seekers and employers through community partnerships.



Pictured L to R: Back Row: Dan Thornton, Cheryl Smith, Diane Jackson, Jessica Williams, Gloria Dodd, Samantha O'Day, Diana Ed-dins-Wiggin, Whitney Williams, Ebony Tucker, Matthew Oberholtzer, Keith Krauth; Front Row: Patrick Shuler, Micah Thomas, Nona Turk, Ginger Little, Wanda Payne, Dawn Bruce, Niki Duncan, Danielle Avelar, and John Phillips.

Mobile Training Units

Thanks to the Governor's Office of Workforce Development (GOWD), the Georgia Mountains Workforce Development received two Mobile Training Units. There is limited access to libraries and computers/internet in some of the counties in the region which makes it difficult for applicants to complete requirements for the program or for job search activities. Both mobile units can provide computer/internet access for tutorial and workforce skills training, on-line job search, pre-employment screening, resume and cover letter development, and job interviewing skills, just to name a few.



Overview/Intake

GMRC Workforce Development staff visited every county in the Georgia Mountains Region at least twice during the year to provide potential participants an Overview Session. Participants learn Workforce Investment Act program eligibility requirements and how to apply for assistance. A total of 2,116 persons attended the overview sessions and a total of 618 new applications were received.

Banks County	17 Persons
Dawson County	10 Persons
Forsyth County	20 Persons
Franklin County	14 Persons
Habersham County	296 Persons
Hall County	1330 Persons
Hart County	167 Persons
Lumpkin County	19 Persons
Rabun County	20 Persons
Stephens County	146 Persons
Towns County	28 Persons
Union County	36 Persons
White County	13 Persons

TOTALS	2,116 Persons
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YOUTH SERVICES

The Georgia Mountains Workforce Development Youth Department has seen great growth in the number of youth served. During FY 2013, a total of 131 youth received workforce development assistance.

2013 Summer Work Experience

- ♦ 92 % Completion Rate
- ♦ 91 youth started Summer Work Experience
- ♦ 84 youth successfully completed

Tutor Program & Project Search

Schools in **Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Towns,** and **Union** Counties participated in a tutoring program. A total of 48 students participated in a tutoring program and 21 students participated in the Project Search Program.



Youth Employment Apprenticeship Resource (Y.E.A.R.) Program

- ♦ 11 students participated
- ♦ Programs in **Banks, Hall, and Hart Counties**
- ♦ Program in progress in **Lumpkin County**

Credit Recovery Assistance

Participants receiving Credit Recovery Assistance were from **Franklin, Hall, Hart, and Stephens Counties.**

ADULT & DISLOCATED WORKERS

Georgia Mountains Workforce Development has served 573 adults over the past year in obtaining further training for employment. Most of these individuals are in a two-year technical college program. All participants must train in a Growth and Demand Occupation for the Georgia Mountains Region. These individuals are followed for one year after completing the program for job advisement and to justify the success of the program. Adults and Dislocated Workers ages range from 18+. Georgia Mountains Workforce Development began an On the Job Training program in the past year that helps individuals who cannot attend school become trained and employed by the company that hires them.



On-the-Job Training (OJT)

GMWD began an On-the-Job Training Program (OJT) in October 2012. On-the-Job Training provides employers with the opportunity to train new employees and receive up to 90% reimbursement for their salary during the OJT training period. OJT helps employers fill the gap between a potential employee's skills and what is required to fully perform the job. Georgia Mountains Workforce Development assists employers in creating a training plan for new employees.



Finance and Administration



Pictured L to R: Back Row: Cheryl Smith, Financial Assistant; Andrea Disharoon, HR Specialist; Front Row: Barbara Moseley, Financial Analyst; Becky Sievers, Finance Director; and Nona Turk, Billing Specialist.

Revolving Loan Fund



GMRC continues to administer the Economic Development Administrations (EDA) Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). We had a few successful loan payoffs this year. In addition, we were able to close four new loans that brings the total active loan count to 12. In

this fiscal year, GMRC was able to assist small businesses in the area including a racetrack/entertainment facility, a construction company, a CPA firm, and a farm equipment supplier. These businesses have successfully sustained and created jobs in the Georgia Mountains Region. The RLF's program assets are \$1.6 million.

Financial Highlights

- ♦ The RC's total net position exceeded its liabilities by \$3,299,382 for the fiscal year reported
- ♦ As of June 30, 2013, the RC's governmental funds reported combined ending fund balances of \$1,039,377, an increase of \$238,841 from the prior year. Of this amount, \$965,802 (unassigned funds) may be used to meet the RC's ongoing obligations to the member local governments and creditors.

Financial

Human Resources

Administrative

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) is funded by federal, state, and local sources. Local dues paid by the 38 municipalities and 13 counties of the Georgia Mountains Region support local technical assistance to member governments. It also provides matching funds to assist the Regional Commission in obtaining and matching available federal and state grants.



Pictured L to R: Peggy Lovell, Executive Assistant; Marissa Smith, Administrative Secretary.

Human Resources Highlights

GMRC was awarded the wellness grant from Local Government Risk Management for the sixth year in a row. GMRC staff participated in several lunch and learns with a wide variety of speakers promoting health and wellness. Staff also participated in a "Biggest Loser" competition awarding staff who chose to participate.

GMRC staff remains cognizant of the changing laws with help from organization such as the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), the FLSA, EEOC, and SSA. The State of Georgia had 2 changes this year for the labor poster requirements and there were Federal changes as well. In accordance, staff has been working with the **City of Maysville** to complete a personnel policy manual.





2012 Outstanding Service Awards

Elected Official of the Year



Ralph Owens, City of Lavonia

Appointed Official of the Year



William C. Chafin, Hart County

Council Member of the Year



Sam Norton, City of Dahlonega

Employee of the Year



Marissa Smith, Secretary

Chairman's Award



Leslie George, Banks County

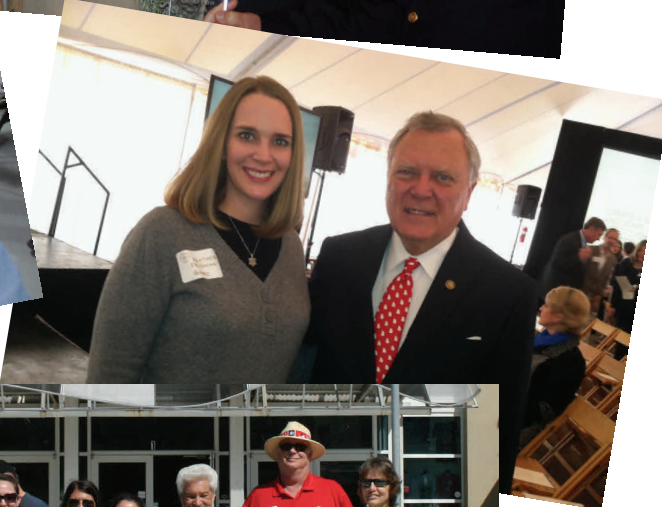




20 Year In



13 Review



GMRC
P.O. Box 1720
Gainesville, GA 30503

Returned Service Requested



Heather Feldman, Editor 770-538-2610